

## Response 5

Why advocate for area studies librarians and collections? This sounds more like a rhetorical than a substantive question. International scholarship and international studies have always found a place at the best research universities; and international studies depend on collections in the same way that the sciences depend on laboratories.

In recent years, however, shrinking budgets and the burgeoning open access movement have driven more and more libraries increasingly to rely on third parties to develop in-depth research collections for the international and area studies programs on their campuses. The problem then becomes how to leverage on-campus collections against other institutions' resources in order to fully support campus programming and research needs.

What remains unchanged in this complicated environment is that American higher education is still second to none and aspires to remain in that position; and until American educators and policy makers give up that aspiration, they have no choice but to foster strong area studies collections and employ the librarians who maintain them. In America there are top-tier universities that do not have medical schools or law schools; but virtually no university can aspire to world-class status without a strong international studies program and supporting collection.

Today, riding the wave of digital technology and content development, research libraries are weeding, if not eliminating, their duplicate print collections. While electronic books and journals are fast bridging the divide between the largest research libraries and their smaller peers, what still distinguishes the former are their foreign language and special collections. This means that areas studies librarianship and collections remains as vital as ever.

### **Provocation**

*"Changes in academic publishing and research, together with growing interest to promote global competencies in North American universities have led to reviews of library organizational structures seeking to align area studies collections and services with these trends. In some cases, new area studies departments have emerged as distinct organizational units in research libraries. In other cases, such units have existed for quite some time. There is a growing recognition that area specialists share similar issues and challenges which demand more encompassing approaches. Since this is a recent development, these area studies units are still trying to find a common voice and strive to position themselves within their institutions, as well as at the national and international levels." (endnote 1)*

### **The pros of developing or keeping intact area studies departments:**

All area studies selectors share a common skill set and face similar challenges and issues. Organizing them into a single unit facilitates exchange of expertise and experience.

Area studies are interdisciplinary by nature, encompassing all major areas of the humanities and social sciences, and routinely extending to science, agriculture, public health, and other areas. They do not fit easily into a discipline-based matrix. Organization of selectors into a single department reflects this complexity of scope.

Having a visible area studies department in the organizational structure of a university research library supports and advances the area, international, and foreign language studies model found at almost all major American universities.

### **The cons of developing or keeping intact area studies departments:**

Area studies collecting can appear insular: local procedures and language- or country-specific practices must be adopted; issues and policies unique to those collections may veer from mainstream library operations. This isolation can irritate outsiders; it can even bring a charge of elitism, particularly from selectors who serve large clienteles on campus. Special effort should be taken to enhance communication between area studies selectors and the rest of the library.

### **Issues and Questions**

1. *"How can area and international studies librarians demonstrate the value and impact of their collections and services—within their libraries, but also at the campus level, as well as nationally and internationally?"*
  - We need to stress that the greatness of a university does not rely solely on how many programs it has, but on how distinguished those programs are. Unarguably, international and area studies collections would contribute significantly to such distinction, being essential to teaching and research, not only in area studies, but in other fields as well.
  - Good international collections attract faculty, students, and visiting scholars from all over the world. They also contribute to faculty retention since they can have a direct impact on scholars' ability to conduct research at their home institutions.
  - Despite the sea change high tech and the internet have brought about, the need to train undergraduate and graduate students in the use of primary source materials remains constant. In-house area studies collections are the most effective tool for such training.
2. *"Are conventional measurements (such as budget allocation, collection size, and circulation figures) still adequate standards for assessing library value and impact?"*

*Is there a need to develop alternative measurements to gauge the impact of area and international studies library services and collections on institutional goals, student learning, and faculty achievement?"*

- Conventional measurements are still important benchmarks for gauging the strength of a library and its impact on its constituency. But increasingly important are electronic measurements, particularly an institution's digital capacity for meeting patron needs through, for instance, remote access and in-time, location-free services and information delivery.
- Usage statistics are often inaccurate and can be skewed. More importantly, they do not take into account the mission of the research library, whose collection priorities cannot be determined by the number of volumes charged out in a given period of time. One responsibility of the research library is to provide materials not universally available and not constantly in demand; this is what distinguishes it from a local public library or a college library.
- Research libraries collect for posterity as well as for their present constituency. Nonetheless, it can be argued that as English-language academic publications become increasingly available online, the need to maintain them in print decreases proportionately. This is not true, however, when it comes to foreign publications (as there is not yet such a cyber-collection)—nor will it become true in the foreseeable future, for a variety of technical, economic, cultural, and geopolitical reasons. Therefore for many area studies collections, collecting for posterity is still the norm and will remain the norm.
- Interlibrary cooperation in collecting materials in all languages is increasingly important. What we must resolve is what our long-term obligations to our collecting partners will be, and how we can ensure that our key research programs and collecting areas will be supported as fully as possible. The challenge will be to develop fair, cost-effective, efficient models for collection development among all partners.
- It is important to develop assessment tools for interlibrary cooperation, and to share information on how peer institutions have restructured their collections budgets to accommodate new collection and service programs.
- Other measurements may include the library's ability to integrate student learning and faculty research into library services, and to incorporate librarians' expertise into the teaching and research paradigm, possibly through teaching, research consultation, data creation, navigation, data and content curating, or courseware development.
- Beyond collections, we need to enhance the discovery experience and information aggregation across national boundaries, such as web archiving of online resources.

3. *"As libraries respond to changes in the academy, publishing, and the information landscape, how can we position area and international studies collections and services as central to the educational mission of the university?"*
  - Look at emerging areas of research. One approach would be to analyze new faculty research interests in light of current collecting practices, then redirect area studies collections in that direction, making them more central to faculty needs.
  - Take a proactive approach to the changing landscape of academic publishing, especially with respect to border-crossing, trans-disciplinary, and interdisciplinary research and teaching, media studies, social networking, and digital humanities and social sciences. The age of big data is here, and we need to consider how our collections and services will adapt to it.
  - Consider the future of Title VI of the National Defense Education Act. This will have a pronounced impact on area studies collections. We need to assess our current reliance on Title VI and develop a strategy for maintaining and developing our collections in the event that Title VI is phased out.
4. *"How can we best communicate the values and contributions of the library to diverse constituencies on campus and beyond? Is the time ripe for introducing strategic planning for area and international studies collections and services?"*
  - We can communicate our values and contributions through venues such as professional publications, newsletters, websites, seminars and conferences, the media (newspaper and television), and library tours.
5. *"The current focus on globalization in North American universities promotes an education based on a broad understanding of societies around the world through the study of foreign languages and the acquisition of area-based knowledge. What does this mean for area and international collections and services in research libraries? If greater demand for international resources is anticipated, how can we advocate for continued support for collections and services that adequately support the teaching and research mission of the globalized campuses?"*
  - International and area studies collections dovetail into the current trend of internationalization. The direct relevance of area studies collections to internationalization cannot be overemphasized.
  - International academic programs are becoming increasingly popular, encompassing the professional schools and extending to the establishment of overseas campuses and research centers. International and area studies collections should support those programs as well as the scholars and alumni returning from those programs.
  - Form strong partnerships with faculty and students. Integrate library services—such as interactive, up-to-the-minute information delivery—into their academic endeavors—global discovery, student training, course development—to

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demonstrate that international and area studies collections are a vital component of building a globalized campus.

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## Endnotes

- 1) The italicized texts here and below are extracts from the "Provocation on Theme III."